

“Estimating the Cost”

Luke 14:25-33

9 September 2007

the Rev. Todd R. Goddard, pastor
Zion West Walworth United Methodist Church

Luke 14:25-33

Now large crowds were traveling with him; and he turned and said to them, “Whoever comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and even life itself, cannot be my disciple. Whoever does not carry the cross and follow me cannot be my disciple. For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not first sit down and estimate the cost, to see whether he has enough to complete it? Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it will begin to ridicule him, saying, ‘This fellow began to build and was not able to finish.’ Or what king, going out to wage war against another king, will not sit down first and consider whether he is able with ten thousand to oppose the one who comes against him with twenty thousand? If he cannot, then, while the other is still far away, he sends a delegation and asks for the terms of peace. So therefore, none of you can become my disciple if you do not give up all your possessions.

Prayer.

Estimation is the calculated approximation of a result, which is usable even if input data may be incomplete or uncertain.¹

This is an important skill that is taught in elementary school math curriculum; one that is useful and beneficial throughout the life span. For example, if you have four items, each costing \$10 or less, what is the maximum the four items will cost? \$40, of course.

When Cynthia and I were newly married and living at the seminary we would do our weekly grocery shopping with \$30 cash. This was the era before money machines and ATMs. We'd cash our checks and take \$30 to the Kroger (pre-Wegman's Dayton, Ohio). We didn't have a calculator, so we kept a running total in our head as we placed each additional item in the shopping cart. God forbid if you stopped to talk with anybody ... you'd forget your approximate total, and have to sort through the cart once again, making the mental tally in your head. One had to be pretty good, or else you'd face the embarrassment of leaving items behind at the check out.

I've noticed in later years that when we don't have the need or the desire to keep a running estimation thinking “I'll just put it on the VISA card” then we spend a lot more money

¹ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Estimation>

(usually needlessly).

The ability to estimate is an important skill in just about every line of work. What are the expected results of the estimated costs and benefits?

The entrepreneur needs to estimate the income and expenses of a project as they turn ideas into a business plan. The investor needs to estimate the risks involved before making an investment. The civil engineer needs to estimate the load bearing ability of an I-beam before it is designed into a bridge. The manager needs to estimate the effects of spending on a budget. The nurse needs to estimate the care requirements of all her patients before beginning to help any one. The teacher needs to estimate the amount of supplies and number of textbooks for the classroom before the first day of class. The general needs to estimate the outcome of battle, given the size of the opposing forces, training, equipment, supplies, terrain, communications, coordination, weather, and support. Even preachers must know how to estimate ... about how many bulletins should we make for Sunday?

Estimation is very important when it comes to making decisions about a life of faith; a life as a disciple of Jesus Christ. The same questions are relevant... "What are the costs?" and "what are the benefits?"

Let's flesh out the approximate costs.

Jesus tells the crowds this morning that the cost of discipleship can be your family. For some people, if they choose to follow Jesus, they will separate themselves from their family and loved ones. This cross can be a heavy burden to bear. Faith makes them the black sheep of the family, or expels them from their circle of friends.

I know this is true in some marriages; which tells me that a frank discussion about faith is one of the most important pre-marital topics that needs to be thoroughly discussed by the prospective bride and groom.

"You're headed off to church? Don't forget to take the kids. I'm going to sleep in. After all, Sunday is my only morning to sleep in."

So, for many in our midst, who make the unpopular decision to be people of faith, in the face of little or no support at home, I commend you. We commend you. And we must vow to support one-another, to make up for the lack of support from others.

There are other costs to discipleship.

It is impossible to be indifferent or uncaring disciples of Jesus. It costs us money to find the broken person by the side of the road, to stop, tend their wounds, take them to treatment, and offer to pay the bill. It costs us money to reach out to the poor; to invite to the

"Estimating the Cost"

Luke 14:25-33

9 September 2007

© the Rev. Todd R. Goddard, pastor

Zion West Walworth United Methodist Church

banquet those who cannot pay and are unable to return the favor. It costs us money to create and ship quilts or mittens, support inner city Hispanic ministries, and to keep our Christian camps going.

It cost money to care, to spread the Gospel, to pass the faith on to the next generation.

Churches generally decide to divide up the price of discipleship into three areas: 1) keeping the building going, 2) paying the pastor, and 3) giving to missions and apportionments. As nice as RG&E is, they are not going to heat our building for free. No matter what you think of the pastor, I can't work for free, nor should any pastor be forced to work for the least amount possible. And without mission and our pooled money to address the truly big issues in society a community of faith would become unbalanced, introverted and selfish; eventually spinning out of control and self-destructing.

Will you support this Body of Christ with your prayers, presence, gifts, and service?

Perhaps the most costly expression of discipleship is your time. In today's world, time is a valuable commodity, often times more valuable than money. Like money, time is a limited quantity.

You can only fit 24 hours into a day. "With three scout meetings, two dance classes, and Sunday morning pop warner football ... where am I going to find the time to follow Jesus?!" "I can't do one more thing," I've heard it say.

Parents need to weigh the cost vs. benefits. It isn't enough to leave it up to our children to make the decision; children don't have the developmental benefits of insight, judgment, or experience to make good decisions ... so they will always default to doing what is fun, not what is right, or what will benefit them most in the long run.

Parents and children alike are asked to make the sacrifice of time to attend and participate in a life of Christ and Christian living. Following Jesus implies that we will re-prioritize our busy lives, and place our participation in the mission and ministries of Jesus Christ right at the top of our list.

Closely related to making a commitment of our time, is our willingness to employ our God given talents for Christ's purposes.

Just for example, if I'm a plumber fixing pipes five days a week, and it comes to the week-end and we have an all-church mission trip to repair the plumbing at camp Asbury, am I going to offer to volunteer my skills and talents? or am I going to sleep in that day, too?

The skills you have came first from God above. This is how God ensures that you'll be able to feed and house your family. And a price for being given your talents, is that Jesus

"Estimating the Cost"

Luke 14:25-33

9 September 2007

© the Rev. Todd R. Goddard, pastor

Zion West Walworth United Methodist Church

expects his disciples to use their talents for his benefits, too. We payback, out of gratitude, for what God has done abundantly for us. Payback can be in money, gifts in kind, or in sweat equity; but do not be mistaken, it is a very real cost of discipleship that must be considered when estimating the cost.

When one takes a careful estimation of the cost of discipleship, it isn't surprising that church attendance and participation is dwindling. Commitment is painful to extract nowadays. We pay a price to follow Jesus.

There are some who subscribe to the belief that any warm body will do; I've heard them called "AWBWD people." These are the ones who will subscribe to just about any tactic to increase church attendance, fill committees, or guilt into a one-time donation.

I bristle at this approach. Jesus deserves better, and we should expect a higher standard, too. It is far more important to have faithful disciples than to have multitudes of uncommitted Christians. Also, when we subscribe to the AWBWD philosophy, it dilutes and cheapens the truly Herculean sacrifices many faithful Christians are making day in, day out.

OK; so the costs are heavy. "What are the benefits?" you may ask. A good estimation depends on both the costs and the benefits.

The benefits of a life lived as disciples of Jesus Christ are both temporal and eternal.

Where Christ is, so is his Body, the gathering of like-minded disciples, who share in the same common values, beliefs, hopes and dreams. The earthly or temporal benefits are simply the fact that you will always be surrounded by a supportive, uplifting, dedicated disciples. We follow those who set a good example. We model our behavior on those more experienced. We lend a hand when others have a need, and likewise, when we find ourselves in need, the community, the Body of Christ, will provide.

So many are searching for this benefit. They seek social clubs, involvement in community groups, or join service organizations. Others join golf leagues, auxiliaries, or hobby groups ... all searching for community, fellowship, and acceptance.

The Christian should never have to look further than their local parish. Discipleship begins at home, but it can be the key that unlocks mission and ministry throughout the world.

And, of course, a life of Christ bears eternal rewards. No investment of faith or works is made in vain. The eternal promise begins with righting the wrongs we've made in this life, that in the world to come, there is forgiveness, healing, and repentance. The eternal promise was made for us on the cross of Calvary, paid for by the blood of Christ, and confirmed with resurrection and an empty tomb.

"Estimating the Cost"

Luke 14:25-33

9 September 2007

© the Rev. Todd R. Goddard, pastor

Zion West Walworth United Methodist Church

Time and time again, Jesus tells those who follow him that it is faith that brings healing and restoration. Faith raises the dead and gives eternal life. Faith in God's promise, covenant and law, in Jesus Christ, is all that is necessary to turn our sacrifice into eternal rewards.

So make your estimation. Weigh the costs vs. benefits, the expenses vs. income, of serving as Christ's disciple. Yes, the cost and expenses are high. Sacrifices are inevitable. But the benefits are, well, endless and eternal.

Amen.

"Estimating the Cost"

Luke 14:25-33

9 September 2007

© the Rev. Todd R. Goddard, pastor

Zion West Walworth United Methodist Church